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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000462

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CACEN, EUR/SNEC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/24/2014

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AJ](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: "POLITICAL MURDER" ROCKS THE ARMENIAN BODY POLITIC

REF: A) YEREVAN 444 B) BAKU 333

Classified By: Ambassador John Ordway for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[¶1.](#) (SBU) The GOAM, parliamentarians, and NGOs agree across the board in calling the February 19 murder of Armenian Lieutenant Gurgen Margarian by an Azerbaijani officer at NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) English training program in Budapest a "political murder," and have been widely quoted in the press (ref A). The GOAM has officially condemned the act as an obvious consequence of the hostile environment towards Armenia fostered by the Azerbaijani leadership. Both pro-government and opposition parliamentarians have called on NATO to review its decision to allow Azerbaijan to host the PfP exercises Cooperative Best Effort 04. (Note: Some political analysts have gone so far as to suggest that the murder may have been ordered by the Azerbaijani leadership to intimidate Armenia into not sending participants to the upcoming exercises. End Note.) A prominent parliamentarian, calling the murder "the second link in the chain," told us privately that he anticipates strong anti-NATO fall-out and a strengthening of anti-Azeri hard-liners' hands. End Summary.

MFA LAMBASTES AZERI "ANTI-ARMENIAN HYSTERIA"

[¶2.](#) (C) In a strongly-worded February 19 statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued the GOAM's official reaction to the killing of Lieutenant Margarian. The MFA condemned the murder, and stated that "(the) crime is a logical consequence of the anti-Armenian hysteria that has been left unreined by the Azeri authorities over the years and of the warmongering militarist propaganda of recent months, which consistently infects all of Azeri society." The Ministry of Defense echoed the charges of the MFA in a statement, contending "this atrocious murder is the direct consequence of Azerbaijan's policy aimed at kindling hatred towards the Armenian people." In discussions February 23, the MFA's NATO desk officer Muhrad Tashcian told us that the initial MFA statement remained the official GOAM position and that Armenia's Ambassador to NATO would be formally presenting a complaint to the NATO Secretary-General in a meeting February 23. He suggested that Armenia may request that the NATO PfP exercise Cooperative Best Effort 04 (CBE 04) be moved from Azerbaijan.

ANTI-NATO BACKLASH LIKELY

[¶3.](#) (C) National Assembly (NA) Military Affairs Committee Chairman Mher Shahgeldian told us that public (and parliamentary) sentiment was already building toward a likely anti-NATO backlash. Shahgeldian echoed other political leaders and noted that the "political murder" was the second link in a chain of recent disturbing events related to NATO: first, he said, NATO did not protest strongly enough when Azerbaijan prevented Armenian participation in the recent planning conference for CBE 04, and now, should NATO not issue a strongly worded statement condemning Margarian's murder as "political," pressure would build to hamper Armenian cooperation with an "anti-Armenian NATO." Shahgeldian insisted that he will do what he can to continue what he characterizes as "strong" current cooperation, but urged the USG to acknowledge the murder as "clearly political."

MAINSTREAM NGOS NO LESS SHRILL

[¶4.](#) (C) The Fund Against Violation of the Law, an NGO headed by new Human Rights Ombudsman Larisa Alaverdian, urged NATO to re-evaluate Azerbaijan's place within the PfP framework as the country's leadership has created an environment where cooperation where cooperation is impossible. Styopa Safaryan, a Political Analyst at the Armenian Center for National And International Studies and recent International Visitor participant, told us that it was impossible to rule

out the involvement of Azerbaijani authorities in the murder. He said that the Azerbaijani government could not politically afford to allow Armenians to participate in CBE 04, and perhaps ordered the killing to intimidate Armenia into not participating. Safaryan contends that this view is shared by many regional security analysts.

DASHNAK YOUTH STAGE SMALL DEMONSTRATION

15. (SBU) The youth group of the Dashnak Party organized a small demonstration at the MFA in the afternoon of February 124. Approximately 70 youth carried banners calling on the international community to respond to the act of "Azeri aggression." They also placed funerary wreaths on the sidewalk in front of the building. Officials in the MFA who witnessed the protest told us that no banners contained anti-NATO slogans.

TEMPERATE COMMENTS HARD TO FIND

16. (C) Vazgen Manukian of the National Democratic Union told us that there were not enough facts known to make a formal conclusion about the case: the alleged murderer could be "mentally-ill or seriously disturbed." He noted, however, that he is one of only a handful of public figures counseling restraint.

COMMENT

17. (C) Little attention is paid by either side to the occasional cross-border sniper attacks that have resulted in a number of other deaths in recent years. This event, however, has galvanized public reaction and will make engagement, let alone compromise, even more difficult than it has been. It is undercutting the Armenian side's political will to engage with Azerbaijan in the Minsk Group process, focusing the attention of the public, and government, on an unfortunate but unusual case that logically should have no bearing on the negotiating process.
ORDWAY